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ABSTRACT

A study compared children's literature which was both popular with children and had received literary awards to those works which achieved only literary awards. Seventeen works of fiction were analyzed and categorized for themes, style, and structure. One adult and one child were interviewed for each work and asked questions about their opinion concerning how the work should be analyzed and categorized. Results indicated that significant differences do exist between books of literary merit children like and those they do not like. These differences were more readily apparent in characteristics of style and structure than for themes. In addition, children liked predictable qualities, an optimistic tone, a lively pace, action-oriented structure and complete resolution. They disliked unresolved endings with tragic tones and introspective plots with a slow pace. Three tables of data are included; and 44 references, a list of the works analyzed, and the interview questions for young readers are attached. (RS)

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CHILDREN'S LITERATURE: COMPARING CHILDREN'S CHOICES AND CRITICAL ACCLAIM

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Running head: Children's Choices

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ABSTRACT

The term "children's literature" implies a fusion between literary quality and child appeal, though this unity is lacking in many books classified as "children's" or books that children read. The purpose of this study was to investigate the characteristics of children's books that do meet both criteria --as Children's Choices and by receiving adult critical acclaim--and to compare them with books receiving literary distinction only. These two groups of books were analyzed for themes, style, and structure. The results then were compared both within and between the two groups. Differences were identified between the two groups and were more marked for characteristics of style and structure than for themes. These findings have implications for the study and criticism of children's literature and for bringing children and books together.

CHILDREN'S LITERATURE:
COMPARING CHILDREN'S CHOICES AND CRITICAL ACCLAIM

I. Background

There used to be a sign posted in the reading corner of my fourth grade classroom that read, "Grab a book and let the book grab you." This signified one of the most important outcomes of teaching for me: that my students would learn to love reading.

Self-selection in choosing books to read was a basic right for these students, and most of the children each year were avid readers. At the same time, I tried to introduce them to books of literary quality--through book talks and book discussions and by reading aloud to them. Still, I noticed that certain books captured their interest more than others and that these children's choices and critical acclaim from adults frequently were not congruent. Nor were my students unique. Nilsen, Peterson, and Searfoss (1980), in a study conducted in Arizona, examined the disparity between books children and adult critics choose and discovered a negative correlation "between the praise of respected critics and the reaction of the majority of children" (p. 530).

The basic problem, then, was why do some books (especially those receiving literary awards from adult selection committees) "enrapture the critics and leave children cold" (Kimmel, 1982, p. 38)? This dilemma is related to how "children's literature" is defined. One way to describe "children's literature" would characterize it as books that children enjoy reading. This, however, would include some books that do not meet literary criteria as well as some books that originally were not intended for children but that do appeal to them. Another approach to "children's literature" would describe it as books written for children. The problem with this definition is that it, too,

includes non-literary books, particulary didactic ones, in addition to those literary works intended for children but that appeal more to adults. A third perspective would view "children's literature" as part of literature as a whole, but distinct in that books written for children must unite literary merit with child appeal. Children's literature, stated Sutherland and Arbuthnot (1986) "consists of books that are not only read and enjoyed, but also that have been written for children and that meet high literary and artistic standards" (p. 5).

Therefore, to judge children's books solely by adult standards of criticism (as argued by the critic, John Rowe Townsend [1973]) is to ignore whether those books hold any relevance for children's literary needs and to "miss the elusive quality that children intuitively seek in a book" (Schlager, 1974, p.1). After all, the authors, editors, publishers, critics, and often even the purchasers of children's books are adults while the intended audience is children.

Is popularity with child readers enough then? I think not. Many of the books my fourth graders enjoyed would not meet literary criteria. But although children's tastes may not be sufficient, they cannot be ignored. Nist (1977) stated that "no study of children's literature is adequate which focuses on the prestigious to the exclusion of the popular" (p. 8). Somehow, there must be a fusion of merit and child appeal.

Gaining an understanding of the qualities in books that compel children to read is important for both educational and literary reasons. Children's literature has suffered, at least in the past, from low status--"kiddy lit"--and from children's authors being accused of playing in a "literary sandbox" (Arthur Ransome, quoted in Bator, 1983, p. 22). Fadiman (1976) even observed that frequently children's literature is denigrated by scholars through

omission. "Literary historians leave out children's literature, as they might leave out the 'literature' of pidgin-English" (p. 10). While Townsend's (1971) position holds that "there is no such thing as children's literature, there is just literature" (p. 378), such thinking actually belittles children's literature as a field of study in its own right. Children's literature gains credibility through recognition of its distinctive qualities and by staking its claim as a "soverign state" (Fadiman, 1976, p. 9).

The educational value rests on the goal of nurturing children who not only can read but want to read. Adults interested in bringing children and books together should care about the lack of commonality between adult critical acclaim and the choices of children. Ley (1979) cited National Opinion Research Center studies showing that in the United States 10% of the population accounts for 80% of the books read. Half the adult population never has read a whole book, and fewer than 20% can think of a book they would like to read. These statistics clarify the failure of schools to develop lifelong pleasure in reading and pose a serious obstacle to the advancement of literacy and an educated democracy. When children's choices are respected and considered as the object of research, educators may gain valuable insights for developing curricula and, ultimately, more enthusiastic readers.

How can the question about child appeal be answered? This researcher believed that one fruitful means of gathering clues lay in giving serious study to the books children choose to read and with which they have had successful transactions. Perhaps by examining the nature of these books, we could learn something about "the common denominator which 'hooks' children" (Schlager, 1978, p. 137). Furthermore, by limiting the scope of such study to those books that also have received critical acclaim (as recipients of a literary award), the merger between quality and popularity can be accomplished.

Additional insights could be gleaned by comparing these books to ones not chosen by children yet selected by adults on book award committees.

The focus of this inquiry then became a literary analysis of the characteristics of books children enjoy and that are recognized as literature and how these books compare with literature written for children but that is more appealing to adults. Specifically, the questions of this study were: What thematic, stylistic, and structural commonalities, if any, are there among books that both are preferred by children and selected by adult award committees as outstanding? What are the similarities and differences between such books and those favored only by the award committees?

II. Method

Naturalistic research methods (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) were employed in this investigation. The researcher was the instrument of the study. The sample was two groups of children's books: one group that met both the criteria of child appeal and of literary merit and another group acclaimed only by adults for literary excellence.

Popular appeal in this study was determined on the basis of "Children's Choices." Formerly "Classroom Choices," this bibliography of children's books has been published each year since 1975 in the October issue of The Reading Teacher (except 1976 in the November issue). The lists are compiled under the direction of a joint committee of the International Reading Association and the Children's Book Council. The selections directly reflect the choices of children, while literary value, though a serious consideration, is of secondary importance.

Since 1977, 10,000 children, divided among five geographic regions (which change bi-yearly), are involved in field testing up to 25 percent (or about

500-700 titles) of each year's children's book publications. The final list contains approximately 100 choices and are grouped by intended audience age level.

Since popularity was not sufficient, the literary merit of books used in this study was established on the basis of their having been a winner of, or finalist for, selected book awards. The specific awards, chosen from Children's Literature Awards & Winners; A Directory of Prizes, Authors and Illustrators (Jones, 1983), met the following criteria: (1) an award for fiction of literary excellence, (2) granted only to books published in the United States, (3) during the same years as the "Children's Choices" selections (1975-1985), and (4) on the basis of adult decisions. The only prizes that met these characteristics were the Boston Globe Horn Book award and the John Newbery Medal.

The books from "Children's Choices" since its inception were cross-checked with the award winners (and runners-up) to determine which books were both a children's choice and a recipient of, or finalist for, at least one of these two awards. Of the 89 award titles, 59 were novels. Of those 59 books, "Children's choices" lists contained eight novels. Those eight books and the awards they received were:

The Hero and the Crown, Robin McKinley (Newbery, 1985).

The Sign of the Beaver, Elizabeth George Speare (Newbery honor, 1984).

Ramona Quimby, Age 8, Beverly Cleary, (Newbery honor, 1982).

A Ring of Endless Light, Madeleine L'Engle, (Newbery honor, 1981).

The Night Swimmers, Betsy Byars (Boston Globe Horn Book fiction honor, 1980).

Ramona and Her Father, Beverly Cleary, (Newbery honor, 1978; Boston Globe Horn Book fiction honor, 1978).

Dragonwings, Laurence Yep (Newbery honor, 1976; Boston Globe Horn Book fiction honor, 1976).

Philip Hall Likes Me. I Reckon Maybe, Bette Greene (Newbery honor, 1975).

The remaining 51 award-winning novels were reduced to a random sample of books that were offered during the "Children's Choices" process but were not preferred by children. This group of nine books and the awards they received were:

One Eyed Cat, Paula Fox (Newbery honor, 1985).

A Solitary Blue, Cynthia Voigt (Newbery honor, 1984; Boston Globe Horn Book fiction honor, 1984).

Homesick: My Own Story, Jean Fritz (Newbery honor, 1983; Boston Globe Horn Book fiction honor, 1983).

The Westing Game, Ellen Raskin (Newbery, 1979; Boston Globe Horn Book fiction, 1978).

Bridge to Terabithia, Katherine Paterson (Newbery, 1978).

Alan & Naomi, Myron Levoy (Boston Globe Horn Book fiction honor, 1978).

Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry, Mildred Taylor (Newbery, 1977; Boston Globe Horn Book fiction honor, 1977).

Abel's Island, William Steig (Newbery honor, 1977).

Child of the Owl, Laurence Yep (Boston Globe Horn Book fiction, 1977).

These 17 books represent three genres of fiction: contemporary realistic fiction, historical fiction, and fantasy.

The content of each of the selected titles was analyzed and categorized by focusing on theme, style, and structure. The overall categories had emerged from the content analysis procedures of a pilot study and were defined

as follows:

THEMES

Child as hero - is developed through a child protagonist who exhibits essentially childlike traits (needs, behavior, thoughts, interests, and perspective), creates a sympathetic portrayal of the state of childhood, and is a means of identification for the child reader.

Growing up - is portrayed through developmental tasks common to many children in the process of maturation.

Relationships - is developed through interactions with other characters.

Problem-solving - is shown through the protagonist's use of talents and capabilities to solve problems independently.

Goals and ambitions - is developed through a character's having realistic aspirations and the perseverance to attain those goals.

Sense of place - is portrayed through a character's need for a place to belong or to call one's own.

Good versus evil - is revealed through a clear delineation between right and wrong, in which the forces of good struggle with the forces of evil.

Illusion versus reality - is portrayed through deceiving appearances and a character's dilemma when faced with reality.

CHARACTERISTICS OF STYLE

Predictability - refers to attributes which engage the reader's attention and enhance predictability, such as chapter titles, foreshadowing, suspense, familiar story structures, and well-known authors and characters.

Language - denotes the use of such things as figurative language and imagery, unusual vocabulary, and alliteration.

Point of view - refers to the perspective from which the story is told. This may be in first person when the narrator is the protagonist, third person when the narrator is the author telling the story from one point of view, or omniscient when the narrator is the author who tells the story from several points of view. In addition, the point of view may be either engaged or detached, depending on how closely the reader is intended to identify with a character. "Engaged" means strong identification is intended, while "detached" provides little or no identification.

Humor - refers to those qualities which provide humor, such as character, incidents, and language.

Tone - describes the overall mood of the story, such as optimistic, depressed, funny, serious, or affectionate.

Symbolism - refers to the use of symbols to develop central themes or to represent ideas.

Sentence structure - refers to the use of varied sentence structures, such as repetition; short, incomplete sentences; parenthical asides; and an unusual number of exclamations--anything that deviates from the standard declarative sentence.

Format factors - concerns the physical appearance of the text, such as the use of italics or capital letters, the presence of illustrations, breaks within chapters, length of chapters and the whole book, and authors' notes.

Pace - describes how rapidly or slowly the narrative progresses.

STRUCTURAL CHARACTERISTICS - show the manner in which the plot and book as a whole are organized, including such things as an episodic plot structure, use of the flashback technique, and complete or open resolutions.

Following the analysis of each book, the validation process began. Two forms of confirmation were employed: interviews and content analysis. For each book, one adult reader competent in literary analysis and one young reader were interviewed separately to confirm and help to revise the content analysis findings.

The other form of corroboration was content analysis of published reviews from three sources for each book. Of the review sources available, The Horn Book Magagine and the Bulletin of the Center for Children's Books were selected as the most highly respected and containing the most in-depth evaluations. In addition, reviews from School Library Journal were included because it is one of the most widely-used review sources by librarians.

The procedures used for this research were as follows:

Each book was read straight through by the researcher one time. From this reading an intuitive understanding of the themes and how those are developed through style and structure was gained. Following the first reading, these insights were written as notes to provide a focus for subsequent readings. The second reading, a much closer one, highlighted everything that was salient to the focus that now was brought to the book. Usually, attention for this reading centered primarily on thematic points, so the books were skimmed through a third and even fourth time, concentrating on characteristics of style. Structural factors emerged from reflecting on the work as a whole.

Once satisfied with the reading of the book, the researcher categorized the portions of the book that were highlighted according to the category structure derived from the pilot study. Additional categories were established as needed, which included three of the themes and two characteristics of style. Sometimes adding a category required reviewing the content analyses of previously completed books and making revisions in those

as well. A code was entered into the margins of the books themselves to designate the categories of the highlighted portions. In addition, the page numbers of each highlighted section were noted on separate sheets of paper under the headings for appropriate categories. The page references were further grouped by identifying phrases under each category heading.

After the content of each book was analyzed, an interview about the book was conducted separately with one of the adults and one of the young readers who had agreed to participate in the study. The discussion with the adults began by the researcher explaining which of the categories she saw as fitting that book and how the content supported her view. The other participant would confirm, make additions, or help to refine this analysis. Following the interview, which was tape recorded and supplemented with field notes, a written summary of it was prepared immediately. Later, the tapes also were reviewed and useful quotes were transcribed. Each interview subsequently was verified with the participant for accuracy. The opportunity was presented, at that time, for the participant to make additions or corrections.

The interviews with the young readers were conducted somewhat differently from those with the adults. Rather than explaining how the categories fit the content of the book, the young reader was asked questions (see Appendix B) to determine how she or he believed the categories matched the content. Again, these interviews were tape recorded and notes were taken, the tape was reviewed, and the interview was rechecked with the participant.

When the content analyses and interviews were complete, a narrative was written of the analysis for each of the 17 books, incorporating direct quotes from the books themselves and from the interviews and published review sources. These narratives were the results of the study. In addition, three matrix

charts were developed to aid data analysis and to depict graphically the results from each book by the overall set of categories.

III. Results

One content analysis is provided in its entirety to exemplify the narratives written for each book. The matrices summarize the remaining results of this research (see Tables 1 - 3).

The Hero and the Crown, Robin McKinley

1. Themes

Aerin, as the youngest member of the royal family of Damar (a mythical kingdom), exemplifies the "child as hero" (the first theme) in this novel. Though the king's only daughter, she feels unaccepted by the Damarians because her mother was a foreigner who was regarded as a witchwoman. And Aerin herself displays none of characteristic Giftedness of the royal family. Her self-concept is very poor, as portrayed by: her "feeling smaller and shabbier than usual" (p. 3); "she was by now so convinced of her lack of coordination that she still broke things occasionally out of sheer dread" (p. 13); or "grinding the lessons into her slow, stupid, Giftless muscles" (p. 45).

Thus, the second theme, "growing up," is developed through Aerin's primary task: "her search for her identity" (Wetmore, Interview, March 17, 1986) and finding her role in life. (The young reader [Interview, March 19, 1986] described this task as something that everyone goes through in growing up.) Slowly, Aerin begins to succeed and to undergo a transformation in feelings of self-worth. "Perhaps it was having a real sword of one's own. Perhaps it was being eighteen--or that eighteen years' practice of being stubborn was finally

paying off" (p. 59). She "comes out to everybody" (Young reader, Interview, March 19, 1986) and begins to assert her rightful place as the king's daughter. Two things enable her to accomplish this transformation: her discovery of the recipe for kenet--a dragon-fire ointment--and her reputation as dragon-slayer.

A third theme in this book is "good versus evil." As noted by The Horn Book Magazine (1985), the plot "intertwines" Aerin's search for identity with "classic confrontations between good and evil" (p. 60). This struggle provides Aerin with a vehicle to prove herself; it becomes her rite of passage. The small dragons she kills eventually lead to her battles with the last of the great dragons, Maur, and with the evil mage, Agsded. "She sees them as a way to find out who she is" (Wetmore, Inteview, March 17, 1986), and they, in turn, attack her on this her most vulnerable point. After slaying Maur, its skull mocks her with, "Witchwoman's daughter. Nothing human could have killed Maur. She will swallow Damar as the Black Dragon never could have..." (p. 137). Agsded reminds her in their fateful meeting, "[The Damarians] call you witch's daughter--and so you are...Your father is kind--why should he not be? You have never been any trouble...And think of who accompanied you to this fateful meeting...you come without even the lowliest Damarian foot soldier, without even a ragged village brat to shine your boots" (pp. 185-186). Yet, Aerin prevails and discovers that she is "the chosen hero" (p. 165), "foreordained to slay the Black Dragon Maur, overcome the evil mage Agsded, and restore the lost Hero's Crown to the rulers of Damar" (The Horn Book Magazine, 1985, p. 60). She then returns to Damar and leads the Damarians to victory over the evil forces of the North, which threaten the kingdom.

"Relationships" is a fourth theme portrayed in this book. Aerin's relationships enable her to accomplish her rite of passage. Her father, Arlbeth the king, loves her, reasons with her, and is not condescending toward her (Young reader, Interview, March 19, 1986). When Aerin asks permission to ride out of the city, he replies, "'Ah. I recommend you go east and south..." (p. 78). "Teka, maid and nurse, maker of possets and sewer of patches, scolder and comforter and friend..." (p. 19), listens as Aerin tells her, "'Someday...I shall be famous in legend and story--'" (p. 55). To which, Teka responds, "'I have never doubted it, my dear'" (p. 55). Tor, her cousin, befriends her as a child, teaches her sword-play, and presents her with her first sword. Eventually, he falls in love with her as well and in the end insists that she be co-ruler with him when they marry. Luthe, the wizard who heals Aerin after her battle with Maur, teaches her what she needs to know to confront Agsded and gives her the magical sword, Gonturan, when she sets out for her fateful meeting. Talat, her horse, with whom Aerin feels a special kinship because of his lame leg (which makes him different from the other horses just as she is different from the rest of the royal family), unfailingly carries her through every battle from her first dragon-slaying to the final great battle with the Northerners.

On the other hand, Aerin's relationships with her cousins Galanna and Perlith and the Damarians provide obstacles to her self-fulfillment. Galanna dares Aerin to eat the poisonous surka to prove her royal blood; Perlith cleverly mocks her in court "by the most delicate inflections, the gentlest ironies" (p. 104). Throughout, Aerin's need to know about her dead mother is blended with her search for her identity. What she finally learns from Luthe, that her mother was the sister of Agsded, becomes the key to Aerin's triumph. Luthe tells her that it is only the "chosen hero, the hero of his blood" (p.165) who may defeat Agsded.

Initially, Aerin has two "goals and ambitions" (a fifth theme): to develop the kenet ointment and to kill dragons. Later she also yearns to find the Hero's Crown. "[T]he thing that held her, the dream that had drawn her on, was the Hero's Crown" (p. 195). Aerin sees these goals as the avenue to her eventual acceptance by the Damarians and the royal court. This, then, to gain the people's trust, to fit in, is her ultimate ambition (Young reader, Interview, March 19, 1986).

Aerin solves her problems (a sixth theme) and accomplishes her aims by being "persistent, industrious, clever" (Wetmore, Interview, March 17, 1986). "She had discovered how to make the dragonfire ointment. It was, she knew, sheer obstinacy that had kept her at it--over two years of making fractional changes in her mixtures, learning how to find and prepare all the ingredients for the mixtures..." (p. 60). With the same tenacity, Aerin perfects her dragon-slaying capabilities, "[a]nd she grew swifter and defter in dispatching the small dangerous vermin" (p. 103).

In the end, then, Aerin gains her "sense of place" (a seventh theme) in Damar and becomes queen. "[M]ost Damarians...seemed to have more or less forgotten that they had ever held the last king's daughter in so lively an antipathy; and affectionately they called her Fire-hair, and Dragon-Killer" (pp. 240-241).

The final theme--"illusion versus reality"--is not developed in this book.

2. Characteristics of style

As noted by the young reader (Interview, March 19, 1986), the genre of this book, a quest-fantasy, creates certain expectations that make it predictable for the reader. The Horn Book Magazine (1985) commented that "[t]he flavor of ancient legend permeates the style without overpowering the plot..."

(p. 60). The themes of good versus evil and the search for identity as part of growing up are in the folklore tradition and familiar to young readers. The quest will not be easy and there will be a series of tests for the underdog hero, but in the end good will triumph over evil. In addition, the young reader (Interview, March 19, 1986) mentioned how Aerin's dreams foreshadow events and enhance predictability by creating a "destiny-type aspect" to the story. Her "mad hallucinations of...a pale face terribly like her own with a dull grey band wound about its temples...and of a cave with five walls that glittered as though it were walled with rubies" (p. 25) foreshadow her meeting with Agsded. Her vision of a "tall blond man" who said, "'Remember me; you have need of me, and I will help you if I can...And you shall again aid Damar, for I will tell you how'" (p. 124), anticipates her journey to find Luthe.

The language in this book also heightens the element of fantasy; "it establishes a non-realistic setting" (Wetmore, Interview, March 17, 1986). First, the author created a unique vocabulary for the kingdom of Damar. These invented words include sol and sola (which denote nobility); hafor, sofor, and thotar (various categories of servants); malak (a hot drink); kelar (Giftedness); folstza (cat-like animals); and yerigs (wild dogs). Secondly, the language chosen is sometimes archaic: "forsook," "gainsay," "noisome," "fortnight," "thus bedecked," and "give battle." Vivid descriptive phrases (The Horn Book Magazine, [1985] characterized it "as richly detailed and elegant as a medieval tapestry" [p. 59].) are often unusual in nature: "Galanna's basilisk glare" (p. 14); "transcendent with gratified vanity" (p. 51); "his well-trained self-esteem" (p. 67); "a treacherous rear assault from a fresh brigade of rolling lumber" (p. 75); "ministers with tactical problems and councillors with strategic ones" (p. 77); "tense with protocol" (p. 84); "non-combatant bystanders" (p. 87); "her army sought better

purchase on the black rockface" (p. 179); "Maur's foul miasma" (p. 228); and "her four-legged henchmen" (p. 239).

At the same time, the unusual syntax enhances the archaic flavor of the author's writing style: "with him would go Tor" (p. 7); "'[y]ou are a woman grown'" (p. 76); "'[a]lmost I missed them entirely'" (p. 112); "it she could see clearly" (p. 136); and "just this she had feared" (p. 224). In addition, the author varies sentence structure with short, incomplete sentences and repetition: "Kenet. It existed." (p. 63); "Trees, blue sky. Stones...Stones, trees, blue sky. Lake. Luthe." (p. 153); "It was a new smell, and it was the smell of a creature that did not care if the meat it ate was fresh or not, and was not tidy with the bones afterward. It was the smell of dragon." (p. 87); "...as if he does not wish to look at anything else. As if he cannot look at anything else." (p. 137); and "...weary, bone-weary, death-weary" (p. 219).

Symbolism is important to the development of the good versus evil theme. Dragons ("Damar had dragons still; little ones, dog-sized, nasty, mean-tempered creatures who would fry a baby for supper and swallow it in two gulps if they could..." [p. 31].), Maur's skull ("Maur's ugly black skull had been hung high on one wall...and it leered at her. I am the shape of their fear, it said, for you dared to slay me" [p. 137].), and Agsded's black tower/mountain ("...the black tower suddenly glowed red, fire red, and the peak of the tower lifted and turned toward her, and the glint of windows was a dragon's red eyes, and the black shadow that bent toward her was a dragon's black head, and it opened its mouth to breathe flame at her" [p. 177].) represent evil. The Hero's Crown ("'The Hero's Crown holds much of what Damar is; or at least much of what her king needs to hold his people together and free of mischief'" [p. 73].), the dragon's bloodstone ("'A dragon's bloodstone

is not for good or wickedness; it just is. And it is a thing of great power...'" [p. 203].), and Gonturan, the blue sword ("'Gonturan is better than a platoon of Darmarian cavalry'" [p. 169].) are all symbols of power. (However, as Wetmore explained [Interview, March 17, 1986], we really are not prepared for how important the bloodstone is before the crucial encounter with Agsded.) Surka, while it "bestowed superhuman strength and the far-seeing eyes of a bird of prey to one of royal blood" (p. 24), was always dangerous, if not truly evil.

The point of view in this book is omniscient. Mostly we are privy to Aerin's thoughts and feelings and identify with her, though at times the narrative picks up others' perspectives. "[Tor] looked at her, feeling a twitch of surprise; in her smile for the first time he saw that which was going to trouble his sleep very soon..." (p. 42). "Tne dragon knew it had killed her...it had been a bit puzzled that she did not scream when it burned her arm, and that she did not scream now and fall down writhing on the earth; but this did not matter" (p. 88).

As the young reader noted (Interview, March 19, 1986), this book is not humorous, but nevertheless it contains humor. The Horn Book Magazine (1985) characterized it as "witty" (p. 60). There is wit in Aerin's self-deprecatory thoughts. "This is typical. On my way to gods know what unspeakable doom, and I break out in a rash" (p. 181). The incongruity of the rash provides comic relief, as well, in the midst of the very tense encounter with Agsded. "The rash on her chest throbbed with extra enthusiasm..." (p. 183). "If only my horrible chest would let me think clearly" (p. 189). In addition, Wetmore (Interview, March 17, 1986) remarked upon the humor in Aerin's relationships with Teka, her nurse, and Talat, her horse, in the prank Aerin played on Galanna in clipping off her eyelashes, and in Perlith's "acid sarcasm."

The tone of this book is serious but optimistic. The young reader (Interview, March 19, 1986) stated, "I felt very strongly everything's going to be all right in the end. I just knew it." Again, that reader partly attributed this feeling to the type of story it is--fantasy. Levity is added by the author's cleverness with language and imagery and by Aerin's wry sense of humor. The book is formatted into two parts; its length is 243 pages. The chapters average 10 pages with breaks. The pace is "perhaps a bit slower, in parts," according to the Bulletin of the Center for Children's Books (1984, p. 30), but School Library Journal (1984 [2]) remarked on its "satisfying action" (p. 169).

3. Structural characteristics

The plot structure contains a flashback within part one of the book. The young reader (Interview, March 19, 1986) said this technique was "confusing" and that it "created problems" because "the boundaries were unclear." The flashback is not set off as a separate part of the book, and there is no warning when it begins. However, The Horn Book Magazine (1985) noted "the epic proportions of the plot" (p. 60), and the Bulletin of the Center for Children's Books (1984) commented on its "sweep and color" (p. 30).

TABLE 1. THEMES

TABLE 1.

CHILDREN'S CHOICES BOOKS

	CHILD AS HERO	GROWING UP	RELATIONSHIPS	PROBLEM-SOLVING	GOALS AND AMBITIONS	SENSE OF PLACE	GOOD VERSUS EVIL	ILLUSION VERSUS REALIT
	THEMES							
The Hero and the Crown	-Protagonist -Youngest member of family	-Rite of passage -Search for identity and role in life -Changing self-concept	-Lend support in quest -Become obstacles in quest	-Attains goals through persistence and patience	-Develop kenet -Kill dragons -Find Hero's Crown -Gain Damarians trust	-Damar	-Aerin against dragons and Agsded -Damarians against Northerners	
The Sign of the Beaver	-Protagonist -Childlike behavior, needs	-Rite of passage -Survival in wilderness -Earning Attean's friendship	-Enable survival -Combat loneliness -Help to understand different cultures (Indian and white)	-Attains goals through acquiring wilderness and domestic capabilities	-Prove capability to father -Earn Attean's friendship			
Ramona Quimby, Age 8	-Protagonist -Egocentricity -Childlike behavior, perspective	-Coping with ordinary problems	-Create and help to resolve problems (family, significant adults)	-Copes with everyday problems at home, school, after school				
A Ring of Endless Light	-Protagonist -Ability to communicate with dolphins	-Accepting death -Confusion over boyfriends -Self-preoccupation	-Help in growing up (family, dolphins) -Add to confusion (boys)	-Uses writing to cope with confusion -Discovers communication with dolphins			-Affirmation of life versus disrespect for life	-Death as natural versus cryonics
The Night Swimmers	-Protagonists -Child development at different stages -Childlike needs, behavior	-Responsibility for brothers -Relinquishing responsibility -Accepting reality	-Help with learning to give up control, accept reality -Provide security (Shorty, Brendelle)	-Solve problems by turning them over to adults				-Retta: "moth -Roy: Bowlwa Plant -Shorty: sin sta
Ramona and Her Father	-Protagonist -Egocentricity -Childlike behavior, understanding, perspective, interests	-One phase in growing up (connects with other Ramona books)	-Show strains of job concerns (father) -Help with everday problems (family)	-Tries to think of ways to make money -Develops anti-smoking plan -Solves costume				
Dragonwings	-Protagonist -Childlike traits, interests	-Making difficult decisions -Taking responsibility	-Lend support in quest to fly -Combat prejudice -Help to understand different cultures (Chinese and American)	-Writes to Wright Brothers for help -Stands up to white boys	-Build and fly airplane -Give up goal for relationships -Retain hope	-Middle Kingdom	-Chinese struggle against American prejudice	
Philip Hall Likes Me. I Reckon Maybe.	-Protagonist -Childlike behavior -Need for younger sibling	-Ambivalence over relationship with Philip Hall -Lessons about life	-Create tension over being the best (Philip Hall) -Show support for doing one's best (parents)	-Relates to Philip Hall -Catches thieves -Earns money -Gets refund -Picks name	-Become veterinarian -Win calf-raising contest			

AWARD-ONLY BOOKS

One-Eyed Cat	-Protagonist -Child alone -Childlike perspective and interests	-Dealing with Mother's illness -Shooting gun -Dealing with guilt -Accepting death	-Help deal with guilt (Mr. Scully) -Provide love (parents) -Provide excitement (Uncle Hilary)	-Accepts responsibility for shooting cat and helps it to get well				-Reality of shooting cat
A Solitary Blue	-Protagonist -Child alone -Fear of abandonment	-Realizing nature of relationship with mother -Dealing with guilt	-Devastate emotionally (mother) -Provide love and support (father and Brother Thomas)	-Uses intuition to understand people		-Charleston -Sea island -Eastern Shore		-Reality of mother's character
Homesick: My Own Story	-Protagonist -Child alone -Childlike behavior and perspective -Need for younger sibling	-Different rates of growing up -Accepting death	-Create pressure to be good (mother) -Provide friendship (Lin Nai-Nai) -Represent home (grandmother)	-Uses father's idea to solve problem with Ian Forbes	-Go home to America -Become a writer	-America -Being caught between two cultures		
The Westing Game	-Protagonist -Only one to solve mystery	-Discovering identities	-Provide key to one mystery -Help to admit true identities	-Solves real mystery	-Recognize true goals and gain happiness			-Real mystery -True identiti
Bridge to Terabithia	-Protagonists -Egocentricity -Inaginative play -Childlike behavior, thoughts, reaction to death	-Expanding view of life -Changing self-concept -Accepting death	-Open doors to new experiences (Leslie, Miss Edmunds) -Make Jess feel important (May Belle)	-Uses play to deal with death -Uses drawing to cope with feelings -Decides on gift	-Be fastest runner -Be like Leslie -Become an artist	-Terabithia		
Alan & Naomi	-Protagonist -Importance of peers -Childlike behavior, interests, perspective	-Making difficult decisions -Loss of innocense	-Change self-concept and concept of girls (Naomi) -Provide irritants and love (parents)	-Uses dummy to help Naomi	-Help Naomi		-Jewish struggle against Hitler	
Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry	-Protagonists -Childlike curiosity	-Loss of innocense	-Create hatred (between races) -Sustain through bitter experiences -Provide negative example (T.J.)	-Repay white school bus -Repay Lillian Jean	-Keep land -Fight prejudice	-The land	-Black struggle against white prejudice	
Abel's Island			-Sustain through year alone (Amanda)	-Attains goal through persistence -Uses resourcefulness to survive	-Get off island			
Child of the Owl	-Protagonist -Child alone -Behavior both childlike and worldly-wise	-Search for identity -Realizing father's true character	-Help to see good in bad (Barney) -Help to discover identity (Paw-Paw)	-Takes care of herself and father -Helps to find thief		-Chinatown -Being caught between two cultures	-Chinese struggle against white prejudice	-Casey: Barney's character -Barney: penthouse

TABLE 2. CHARACTERISTICS OF STYLE

TABLE 2.

CHILDREN'S CHOICES BOOKS

	PREDICTABILITY	LANGUAGE	POINT OF VIEW	HUMOR	TONE	SYMBOLISM	SENTENCE STRUCTURE	FORMAT FACTORS	PACE
The Hero and the Crown	-Story structure of genre -Foreshadowing	-Unique vocabulary -Archaic vocabulary -Description	-Omniscient	-Comic relief of rash -Relationships	-Serious -Optimistic	-Dragons -Agsded -Dragon's bloodstone -Gonturan -Book title	-Unusual syntax -Short, incomplete sentences -Repetition	-Two parts -Chapters: 10pp. with breaks -Total: 243pp.	-Satisfying action -Slower in parts
The Sign of the Beaver	-Foreshadowing -Lead sentences of chapters	-Figurative language appropriate to historical period -Details -Strong verbs	-Third person, engaged	-Events	-Suspenseful -Optimistic	-Robinson Crusoe -Manitou	-Short, incomplete sentences	-Italics -Chapters: 5pp. -Total: 135pp.	-Rapid
Ramona Quimby, Age 8	-Chapter titles -Lead sentences of chapters -Familiar author and character	-Realistic dialogue	-Third person, engaged	-Events -Illustrations	-Light -Optimistic			-Illustrations -Chapters: 20pp. with breaks -Total: 179pp.	-Rapid
A Ring of Endless Light	-Familiar author and character	-Poetic imagery and descriptions -Unrealistic dialogue -Contrasts	-First person		-Serious -Optimistic	-Zachary -Hospital -Black holes -Dolphins -Adam -Book title	-Short, incomplete sentences -Repetition	-Italics -Chapters: 27pp. with breaks -Total: 325pp.	-Rapid -Many dramatic scenes
The Night Swimmers	-Suspense -Cliff-hangers	-Language appropriate to characters	-Omniscient	-Roy's behavior -Shorty's appearance, songs	-Serious -Optimistic -Warm	-Swimming pool -Bowlwater plant -Flying -Music star -Book title		-Illustrations -Chapters: 7pp. -Total: 131pp.	
Ramona and Her Father	-Chapter titles -Familiar author and character	-Realistic dialogue -Concrete imagery	-Third person, engaged	-Ramona's behavior -Illustrations	-Light -Optimistic			-Illustrations -Chapters: 25pp. with breaks -Total: 176pp.	-Rapid
Dragonwings	-Foreshadowing -Chapter titles -Dates	-Descriptions -Figurative language appropriate to culture and symbolism	-First person	-Relationships -Perspective	-Serious -Optimistic	-Dragons -Flying -Names -Book title		-Italics -Afterword -Chapters: 20pp. with breaks -Total: 245pp.	-Sufficient action -Slow
Philip Hall Likes Me. I Reckon Maybe.	-Chapter titles -Dates	-Dialect -Hyphenated descriptive words -Figurative language	-First person	-Relationship	-Light -Optimistic -Intimate			-Illustrations -Chapters: 19pp. with breaks -Total: 132pp.	-Rapid

AWARD-ONLY BOOKS

One-Eyed Cat	-Ambiguous chapter titles -Suspense -Ambiguous beginning poem	-Figurative language, imagery	-Third person, engaged	-Mrs. Scallop	-Serious -Despairing -Optimistic ending	-Cat -Gun		-Chapters: 26pp. with breaks -Total: 21tpp.	-Slow
A Solitary Blue		-Figurative language	-Third person		-Serious -Optimistic -Emotionally draining	-Guitar -Jade ring -Book title	-Short, incomplete sentences -Repetition	-Two parts -Chapters: 20pp. with breaks -Total: 242pp.	-Slow
Homesick: My Own Story		-Descriptions	-First person	-father -Miss Crofts	-Serious -Optimistic -Conversational	-America -Marjorie	-Short, incomplete sentences	-Italics -Illustrations -Photographs -Foreword -Author's note -Chapters: 21pp. -Total: 1'4pp.	-Slow -Smooth flow
The Westing Game	-Clues, real and false -Chapter titles -Unpredictable plot	-Overwriting -Alliteration -Hyphenated adjectives	-Omniscient, detached	-Stereotyped characters -Word play	-Ironic -Clever -Slapstick -Optimistic	-Chess -Uncle Sam -Ethnic mixture	-Short, incomplete sentences -Exclamations -Parentheticals	-Bullets -Chapters: 6pp. with breaks -Total: 185pp.	-Rapid
Bridge to Terabithia	-Chapter titles -Foreshadowing (enhanced by symbols)	-Figurative language appropriate to setting -Dialect	-Third person, engaged	-Events -Jess' wit	-Serious -Sad -Optimistic ending -Engaging	-Falling -Water -Bridges -Leslie -Rope	-Short, incomplete sentences	-Italics -Illustrations -Chapters: 10pp. -Total: 128pp.	-Rapid
Alan & Naomi	-Unpredictable plot	-Figurative language	-Third person, engaged	-Ethnic	-Conversational -Tragic ending	-Model airplane	-Short, incomplete sentences -Exclamations	-Italics -Capital letters -Chapters: 6pp. -Total: 185pp.	-Rapid
Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry	-Sequence of events	-Dialect -Imagery	-First person	-Cassie's perspective	-Serious -Tragic ending	-Land -Thunder -Gun -Car -Book title		-Author's note -Chapters: 18pp. -Total: 210pp.	-Rapid -Forceful action
Abel's Island	-Character	-Flowery descriptions	-Third person, engaged -Adult mouse	-Gower -Attempts to escape island	-Sophisticated -Light -Optimistic	-Scarf -Owl -Owl's feather -Cat		-Illustrations -Chapters: tpp. -Total: 116pp.	
Child of the Owl	-Clues -Foreshadowing -Character	-Figurative language enhances symbolism -Slang	-First person	-Casey's perspective -Events	-Serious -Optimistic	-Owls -Owl charm -Chinese artifacts		-Italics -Afterword -Chapters: 21pp. with breaks -Total: 215pp.	-Slow

TABLE 3.

		STRUCTURAL CHARACTERISTICS
CHILDREN'S CHOICES BOOKS	The Hero and the Crown	-Flashback -Complete resolution -Action-oriented
	The Sign of the Beaver	-Symmetrical structure (father leaves, family returns) -Complete resolution -Action-oriented
	Ramona Quimby, Age 8	-Episodic -Complete resolution -Action-oriented
	A Ring of Endless Light	-Begins and ends with Vicky's and Adam's relationship -Unanswered question about Zachary -Complete resolution -Action-oriented
	The Night Swimmers	-Begins with children alone, ends with adults in charge -Complete resolution -Introspective
	Ramona and Her Father	-Episodic -Clear sequence -Complete resolution -Action-oriented
	Dragonwings	-Circular structure -Complete resolution -Action-oriented
	Philip Hall Likes Me. I Reckon Maybe.	-Episodic -Complete resolution -Action-oriented

		STRUCTURAL CHARACTERISTICS
AWARD-ONLY BOOKS	One-Eyed Cat	-Beginning poem sets theme -Complete resolution -Introspective
	A Solitary Blue	-Begins and ends with Melody leaving -Unanswered question about Brother Thomas -Complete resolution -Introspective
	Homesick: My Own Story	-Complete resolution -Introspective
	The Westing Game	-Tight chapter transitions -Complete resolution -Action-oriented
	Bridge to Terabithia	-Begins with self-preoccupation, ends with opening to others -Complete resolution -Action-oriented
	Alan & Naomi	-Incomplete resolution -Action-oriented
	Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry	-Incomplete resolution -Action-oriented
	Abel's Island	-Complete resolution -Action-oriented
	Child of the Owl	-Barney's character unresolved -Complete resolution -Introspective

IV. Discussion

Differences were found between the books that both are preferred by children and selected by adult award committees as outstanding and those books favored only by the same award committees. However, the difference in children's interest or lack of interest in a book written for children appears to hinge more on style than substance. Put another way, themes show considerable similarity between the Children's Choices books and the award-only books, while characteristics of style and structure demonstrate much more marked differences.

A summary of the thematic comparisons follows:

In every novel except Abel's Island (award-only book) the first two themes, "child as hero" and "growing up," are developed. The question then arises whether that book is, in fact, a children's book. The lack of a child protagonist, the adult point of view, and the sophisticated tone and language combined with illustrations and anthropomorphism make it difficult to determine an intended audience. The first three qualities tend to distinguish a book as one for adults rather than children (McDowell, 1973), while the last two characteristics usually are marks of books for younger children. According to Cullinan (1981), "[c]hildren approximately three to seven years old attribute human thought, feeling, and language to animals dressed like people" (p. 214), and therefore, "animal fantasy is a well-loved form among children at this stage" (p. 214). Thus, while the animal character in Abel's Island is a trait younger children enjoy, the content and style would be more appealing to adults (an adult mouse marooned on an island without his beloved mouse spouse). Perhaps this book would be better described as a children's book for adults.

The "relationships" theme is important to every novel in this study except The Westing Game (award-only book), in which it is a minor theme. Five award-only books portray only-child protagonists. Of those, only Alan & Naomi shows strong relationships with other children. In the remaining four books, the central character relates comparatively little to other children. Rather, the only child develops a close emotional relationship and finds companionship with an adult: One-Eyed Cat, with old Mr. Scully; A Solitary Blue, with the Professor and Brother Thomas; Homesick: My Own Story, with Lin Nai-Nai and Grandmother; and Child of the Owl, with Paw-Paw. On the other hand, two Children's Choices books portray central characters as only-children and both of those have close, satisfying relationships with peers: The Hero and the Crown and Dragonwings. Therefore, children appear to prefer books in which protagonists interact with other child characters. They seem not to like books as well in which central characters' interactions with other children are very limited.

"Problem-solving" is developed to some extent as a theme in every book. "Goals and ambitions" is the most important theme in Dragonwings and is less important in three other Children's Choices books: The Hero and the Crown, The Sign of the Beaver, and Philip Hall Likes Me. I Reckon Maybe. This theme also is central to Abel's Island and to a lesser extent in five other award-only books: Homesick: My Own Story, The Westing Game, Bridge to Terabithia, Alan & Naomi, and Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry.

"Sense of place" as a theme is apparent in only two Children's Choices books (The Hero and the Crown and Dragonwings) but five award-only novels--A Solitary Blue; Homesick: My Own Story; Bridge to Terabithia; Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry; and Child of the Owl. Although the primary theme in Homesick: My Own Story, "sense of place" is not a major theme in the other

books. Moreover, "sense of place" as Jean's need for a country does not seem to be a theme with which children typically can identify. The adult reader, Loehr (Interview, March 21, 1986), speculated that this is not a universal childhood need. "It is a very personal need on her part." This idea was confirmed by the young reader (Interview, April 2, 1986) and by Jean's classmates in her new school at Washington, P.A. When the class rises to pledge allegiance to the flag, Jean speaks loudly and clearly, while the rest of the class mumbles. They do not seem to attach the same importance to this symbolic act as does Jean.

"Good versus evil" is a major theme in The Hero and the Crown and a minor one in A Ring of Endless Light (both Children's Choices books). In four other books this theme is manifested through the struggle against racial hatred and prejudice: Dragonwings (Children's Choices book), Alan & Naomi, Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry, and Child of the Owl (award-only books).

Interestingly, the "good versus evil" theme is not as apparent as might be expected, given children's need for a clear-cut moral schema. As explained by Tucker (1972), "The more clearly people are demarcated as goodies and baddies the easier it is for the child to know what is going on" (p. 51). And McDowell (1973) has stated, "From a child's point of view not only is such a view [that good will triumph and evil will be punished] safe and reassuring, it is also optimistic" (p. 54). However, most of the books in this study were appropriate for readers aged 10 to 18, rather than the young child for whom a clear-cut moral schema is more important. Fairy tales, for example, which clearly delineate good and evil, are most appealing from ages six to eight, according to Favat (1977). (The book in this study in which good versus evil is most striking, The Hero and the Crown [Children's Choices book], is a young adult book growing out of the folklore tradition. Favat [1977] postulated "a

resurgence of interest [in fairy tales] around the age of 18 to 20 that seems to continue throughout adult life" [p. 56]).

The final theme, "illusion versus reality," is revealed in four award-only books but only two Children's Choices novels. It is the primary theme in The Westing Game and a minor one in One-Eyed Cat (both award-only books). A Ring of Endless Light (Children's Choices book) touches upon this theme. Three other books present noteworthy comparisons on this theme. In The Night Swimmers (Children's Choices book) and Child of the Owl (award-only book) the father lives with an illusion of becoming famous or rich. Moreover, Barney (Child of the Owl) and Melody (A Solitary Blue [award-only book]) both present their own characters falsely to their children. However, "illusion versus reality" does not appear to be as important a theme to children, since it is less evident in the Children's Choices books than the award-only books.

The most striking differences, however, between Children's Choices books and award-only books lie in characteristics of style and structure. The salient points about style include the following:

Attributes that sustain the readers' attention and enhance predictability--such as chapter titles and strong lead sentences, foreshadowing, suspenseful plots and the presence of familiar story structures and well-loved authors and characters--are evident in every Children's Choices novel. However, these traits exist without qualification in just three award-only books: Bridge to Terabithia, Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry, and Child of the Owl. One-Eyed Cat does have an "advance organizer" (the Whitman poem), chapter titles and some suspense, but those are counteracted by the ambiguity of the poem and titles and the slow pace. The Westing Game does contain chapter titles and genuine clues, but those hints are overshadowed by the false clues. Abel's Island may have a predictable protagonist, but that character may not be one familiar to most young readers.

Predictability allows the child reader to bring and to create expectations about the narrative. When these predictions are fulfilled, the reader may feel control over the progression of the story, a state that is both comforting and reassuring. (Tucker [1972] noted the importance of conventions in children's books that enable predictions, and, therefore, children feel more in control of the story.) This desire for order and control is confirmed by Piaget's theory of child development (Ault, 1983), which postulates that from birth human beings are engaged in organizing (through classifying and categorizing) all stimuli into cognitive structures. This ordering makes the stimuli more manageable, useful, and predictable. Therefore, for the child reader, whose experience is less than an adult's and to whom immediate events and the world beyond often may seem out of his or her control, some measure of predictability in the books that are read may be very important.

Language, point of view, and humor do not differ markedly between the Children's Choices and award-only books, but the single novel written from a very detached, unengaged point of view is The Westing Game, an award-only book. (The impersonal narrator creates ironic distance and prevents the reader from identifying strongly with the protagonist.) Two characteristics of style, though evident in both groups of books, are more typical of award-only novels than Children's Choices books. All nine award-only books contain symbolism, while five of eight Children's Choices novels use it. Five award-only books, compared to three Children's Choices books, show noteworthy sentence structures. Format factors reveal marginal differences. The two groups of novels contain the same number of books (five) with lengthy chapters. However, illustrations reduce the actual number of pages of text and also provide breaks within the chapters. Only two of the five Children's Choices books with long chapters do not use illustrations. In contrast, four of the five award-only novels with long chapters are not illustrated.

The remaining two characteristics of style--tone and pace--demonstrate noteworthy differences between the Children's Choices and award-only books. Most of the novels (a total of 14 out of 17) are optimistic in tone. The other three novels are award-only books. Bridge to Terabithia, while ultimately optimistic, is very sad. Alan & Naomi and Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry both end in tragedy. A faster pace is more typical of the Children's Choices books than the award-only books. Two Children's Choices novels, as opposed to four award-only books, could be categorized as slow in pace. Moreover, the most extremely slow-paced novel, One-Eyed Cat, is an award-only book.

Therefore, it appears that children prefer books with an optimistic tone and a lively pace. (These are two of the distinguishing characteristics between children's books and fiction for adults, according to McDowell [1973].) Deep sadness and a slower pace are not typical of books that children choose. (As Tucker [1972] stated, "It is not fair to children to get rid on to them adult depression and cynicism...[O]ne does not come upon this meaningless view of the world because in a sense the child is not ready for it" [p. 54]. And Huck [1979] asserted that "when you close the door on hope, you have left the realm of childhood" [p. 6]). In addition, Sloan's (1975) suggestion that tragedy and irony are plots of "experience" and disillusionment implies their inappropriateness for childhood, a time of "innocence" and hope. (Therefore, the ironic tone of The Westing Game also may militate against its popularity.) Rather, Paterson (1986) suggested that comedy is what children need, for comedy (in the sense of rebirth after overcoming obstacles) is characterized by "sagacity and humor and hope" (p. 294).

Finally, the Children's Choices and award-only books differ in structure. Again, as with tone, most of the novels (15 of 17) show complete resolution, but the remaining two books with unresolved endings (Alan and Naomi and Roll of

Thunder, Hear My Cry) are both award-only books. It should be noted that these are the same two novels that end with a tragic tone, suggesting that when a depressive tone is coupled with an unresolved ending, that book is not likely to be appealing to the typical child reader.

Another difference between the groups of books is the degree of action-orientation in the plot structure. Four award-only books, as compared to one Children's Choices novel (The Night Swimmers), could be described as less action-oriented and more introspective in structure. Interestingly, these four award-only books are the same four slow-paced award-only novels: One-Eyed Cat, A Solitary Blue, Homesick: My Own Story, and Child of the Owl, which leads to the conclusion that books combining introspection with a lagging pace are not likely to have wide drawing power among child readers.

To summarize, the fundamental conclusions of this investigation are:

(1) Noteworthy differences do exist between books of high literary quality that children prefer (selected for this study) and those literary works with less appeal for children.

(2) The differences between these two groups of books are more readily apparent for characteristics of style and structure than for themes.

(3) In particular, predictable qualities, an optimistic tone, and a livelier pace are stylistic points evident in books favored by children.

(4) Children's book preferences gravitate toward action-oriented structures and complete resolutions.

(5) Certain combinations are especially unpopular: an unresolved ending with a tragic tone and an introspective plot with a slow pace.

These conclusions have implications both for the study and criticism of children's literature and for bringing children and books together.

(1) Implications for the study and criticism of children's literature:

In defining "children's literature," both parts of that term must be recognized equally. First, what is " children's"? Not merely books intended for children, "children's" means books claimed by children as theirs. Perhaps McDowell (1973) arrived the closest at capturing the essence of ownership: "...a child's book...is one a child can enter and need no other guide than the author" (p. 62). Second, what is "literature?" This part of the definition is established by meeting the same literary standards that apply to all literature. True "children's literature" must meet both criteria: child appeal and literary merit.

The Children's Choices books examined in this study meet both criteria; they both were preferred by children and selected by adult award committees for literary distinction. The unique characteristics of these books that were found in this investigation, added to the results of other research, should enhance both the study and criticism of children's literature.

Knowledge of the qualities that contribute to child appeal and an understanding of their roots in child development enable the critic to give serious consideration to the books that are truly children's. Once an evaluation is made on that level, concern should turn to literary quality. Child-centered literary criticism makes different demands upon the critic: "to preserve both those qualities which are literary and those which are childlike" (Brett & Huck, 1982, p. 882). "The task of the critic of children's books is not to give them the status of being able to stand up to the same critical standards we apply to adult novels, but to get down to the business of criticizing children's books for what they are, and to giving more recognition to those writers who know what writing for children is about" (Collinson, 1973, p. 47).

In addition, scholars, while continuing to explore the elusive nature of child appeal, should study in-depth those books that genuinely may be classified as children's literature and use those books as benchmarks for establishing a discipline of children's literature. Such study and criticism will strengthen the identity of children's literature, for as Fadiman (1976) stated, "...the specific identity of any art becomes more firmly established as it develops self-consciousness. Of that self-consciousness critics, scholars and historians are the expression" (p. 19). Furthermore, it is the strong belief of this researcher that a sense of self-conscious identity will enhance the status of children's literature as it did the status of Aerin in The Hero and the Crown.

(2) Implications for bringing children and books together:

One of the primary aims of reading instruction is to develop children who value and enjoy reading. Yet all too often, even children who can read do not want to read. They grudgingly read only the books required of them and virtually stop reading when they leave school. Thus, the educational implications of this research for bringing children and books together are far from complex: an adult working with a group of children should use books in the classroom that children enjoy and allow for children to choose the books they want to read. To paraphrase Meek (1982), true children's literature, "not reading lessons, teaches children to read in ways that no basal reader can, because literature is read, if at all, with passion, with desire" (p. 291).

Passion and desire are the essential ingredients of motivation, and children will want to read if their motivation to read is high. As Rosenblatt (1974) asserted, "We must offer [the child] works to which something in his own life, his own preoccupations, and his linguistic experience may serve as a bridge. Only then can he have a literary experience" (p. 359).

Then we will have brought children and books together. Perhaps then we will accomplish what Estes and Johnstone (1977) described as the "one difficult way to make children love reading: Be as certain as you possibly can be that anything you ask any student to read is something he or she can read and will want to read" (p. 897).

Through this study a way of defining children's literature has been re-emphasized that creates its own unique realm within literature as a whole. "A distinctive children's literature has a uniqueness which relates to the nature of children" (Brett & Huck, 1982, p. 882). When books "grab" the interest of children, they are capable of playing an important role in the lives of their readers. A solid understanding of the nature of childhood and extensive knowledge about literature must be combined in the study, criticism, and use of children's literature.

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APPENDIX A

Children's Books

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APPENDIX B

Interview Questions for Young Readers

1. Do the child characters in this book seem like real kids to you? Why or why not?
2. Is this book about growing up? If so, give examples.
3. What are the important relationships in this book? Why are they important?
4. Do the child characters in this book solve problems? If so, give examples.
5. Do the characters in this book have goals and ambitions? If so, give examples.
6. Is this book about needing a place to belong? If so, explain.
7. Is this book about good against evil? If so, explain.
8. Is this book about things not being what they seem to be? If so, explain.
9. Was there anything about this book that helped you to know or predict how the story would develop?
10. What, if anything, did you notice about the language in this book?
11. Who is telling the story?
12. Is there anything funny in this book? If so, give examples.
13. What words would you use to describe this book, overall, to a friend?
14. What is the meaning of [a symbol] in this story? Are there other things that seem to represent something in this story? If so, give examples.
15. What, if anything, did you notice about the sentences in this book?
16. What can you tell me about the appearance of this book? (Probe with specific questions about format factors, such as illustrations.)
17. How fast or slow did this story move?
18. Was the ending of the story complete? If not, why not?
19. What else can you tell me about the organization of this story?
20. What as the main thing this story was about?
21. Could you identify with this story in any way? Explain.
22. Did you like the book? Why or why not?
23. Is there anything else you want to tell me about this book?
24. In what ways does this book compare with [another book in the study discussed previously]?